

**Opening Statement of Senator Larry Craig,
Chairman, U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging**

Hearing on “A Fresh Look at Mandatory Retirements: *Do They Still Make Sense?*”

September 14, 2004

Good morning and welcome. Today's hearing to re-examine mandatory retirement age rules is an issue of growing concern for employers and workers across the nation.

Mandatory retirement rules do not apply to rank and file workers in the private sector.

Federal, state, and local governments have mandatory retirement rules for public-safety related jobs with a physical and cognitive fitness requirements.

Public safety is clearly the most important policy consideration in evaluating mandatory retirement rules.

But those of us who study this issue know there has been a dynamic increase in longevity and a trend toward healthy aging over the past half century. Americans are living longer and healthier than ever before.

As a result, chronological age is less often an indicator of physical and cognitive age for many workers.

In 6 short years, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a shortfall of 10 million workers in the United States due to an aging workforce. Much of the shortfall will be among skilled workers such as those covered by mandatory retirement rules.

For example, it is reported that nearly half of the nation's air traffic controllers will reach the mandatory retirement age of 56 in the next decade.

In order to prepare for the future, it is important that lawmakers understand the impact of changing demographics on our workforce.

Mandatory retirement age rules seem outdated to many experts. And that is why we are here today—to examine specific professions that are subject to Federal mandatory retirement rules.

Today's hearing will focus on mandatory retirement rules with a Federal government nexus. We will be looking at Federal law enforcement, correctional officers, firefighters, air traffic controllers, and commercial airline pilots.

Our goal is to better understand the dynamics of each profession and whether 20th century mandatory retirement age rules still make sense in the 21st century.

With that, let me say I am pleased to welcome our distinguished witnesses here today.

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